

Hong Kong Tiananmen Massacre vigil group disbands following pressure from authorities

dimanche 26 septembre 2021, par [GRUNDY Tom](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 25 septembre 2021).

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Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, founded in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, riled Beijing by advocating an end to one-party rule.

The group behind Hong Kong's annual Tiananmen Massacre vigil has decided to disband after 32 years following a vote at a special meeting on Saturday 25. It comes after months of pressure from the authorities and the arrest of the group's leadership.

Founded in the year of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China fought for accountability from Beijing, advocated the democratisation of China, and sought an end to one-party rule.

During Saturday's vote, 41 members voted in favour of disbanding, whilst four voted against.

Speaking to the press afterwards, Company Secretary of the Alliance Richard Tsoi said he was "sad" about the disbandment : *"I do believe Hong Kong people, no matter in [an] individual capacity or other capacities, will continue commemorating June 4th as before."*

Tsoi added that he will visit the grave of Alliance founder Szeto Wah, as he believed that - were he still alive - Szeto would use all means to think how to preserve their energy and people's hope. *"I believe that [Szeto] was a principled person, and also someone who valued the group's safety and how to advance and retreat depending on the political environment,"* Tsoi said.

Activist and former district councillor Tsang Kin-shing, who attended the meeting, also said Hongkongers will find other ways to commemorate June 4 : *"This is a heart-breaking disbandment, because the government used all its public power and laws to force civil society organisations to disband one after another... Today, you can disband this group, but the peoples' heart to commemorate June 4th will not dissolve, I believe citizens will use their own ways of expression."*

32 years of activism

In the wake of the 1989 crackdown, the Alliance assisted with providing shelter and financial assistance to fleeing student leaders. It worked with survivors and the relatives of victims and opened a Tiananmen Massacre museum in 2014. Each year, the Alliance held a fun run, kite-flying event and - most famously - a mass, candlelit vigil in Causeway Bay's Victoria Park to remember the victims on the massacre's anniversary.

In July, the Alliance slashed its standing committee and announced it would dismiss all permanent staff for safety reasons. *“As part of Hong Kong’s civil society, [the Alliance] has been particularly affected by the increasingly severe and obvious political repression,”* the group’s statement read, though it said it would continue operations.

For months, the Alliance faced attacks from the pro-establishment camp and state media who have urged the city’s authorities to ban the group. A senior Beijing official on Hong Kong affairs said in June that those using the group’s trademark slogan *“end one-party rule”* were enemies of the state, while a pro-Beijing businessman said the group would have to either disband or be shut down by authorities.

The vigil – which often attracted over 100,000 people – was banned in 2020 and this year with the authorities citing the risk of spreading Covid-19.

Alliance leaders Lee Cheuk-yan and Albert Ho were jailed in April after they joined mourners in Victoria Park last year despite the ban. In letters posted by the Alliance this week, they urged members to disband the group.

During Saturday’s meeting, a new letter from Lee was circulated among members : *“No regime can take away peoples’ memory and conscience, the Alliance’s belief has already been inherited in the hearts of each Hong Kong person – hope is there when there is kindling,”* he wrote. *“The fight for vindicating June 4th and establishing democracy will be taken over by thousands of people.”*

Company registry

Earlier in September, the government began the process of striking the Alliance from the Companies Registry. Secretary for Security Chris Tang sent a letter to Vice-chairperson Chow saying that he would ask the Chief Executive in Council to exercise their power to strike off the group in accordance with the Companies (Winding Up and Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance.

In a letter responding to Tang, the Alliance said that – as all executive committee members have been sentenced to jail or remanded – they could not hold a meeting *“to have a full discussion,”* but the group refuted accusations made by Tang and the police chief.

“We must point out in all seriousness that the Alliance do not agree with or accept the Commissioner of Police – and your – categorisation of the Alliance, the Alliance also cannot see that the government has clear and ample evidence to claim that the existence of the Alliance is endangering national security, public safety, and public order,” the letter read.

“The Alliance has been legally registered in Hong Kong and has operated legally for over 32 years, any unreasonable accusations and arbitrary outlaw of the Alliance, are a violation of freedom of association protected by Articles 27 and 39 of the Basic Law,” the letter said.

Civil society crumbles

The Alliance is the latest group to call it quits in the wake of the national security law, enacted last June by Beijing following the 2019 protests and unrest. On August 15, the protest coalition which organised some of the biggest pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong’s history announced it would disband.

Founded in 2002, the **Civil Human Rights Front** cited pressure from the authorities, just three days after Hong Kong’s largest teachers’ union announced it would also fold.

On Friday 24, **Student Politicism** folded after its leaders were arrested this week under the

security law.

The Tiananmen massacre occurred on June 4, 1989 ending months of student-led demonstrations in China. It is estimated that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people died when the People's Liberation Army was deployed to crack down on protesters in Beijing.

Hong Kong's security law gave police sweeping new powers, alarming democrats, civil society groups and trade partners, as such laws have been used broadly to silence and punish dissidents in China. However, the authorities say it has restored stability and peace to the city.

In response to Saturday's disbandment, Yamini Mishra of **Amnesty International** said : *"For 32 years, the Chinese government has sought to censor all mention of the Tiananmen crackdown on the mainland. The effectively forced disbandment of the Hong Kong Alliance is the latest signal that authorities in Hong Kong are keen to do the same."*

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